



President's Message

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the first issue of the Spring Wings Newsletter, *The Stilt*. Spring Wings is in its eighth year. Last year we had over four hundred people attend the May birding festival.

The idea for Spring Wings started back in late 1997 or early 1998 when Bob Flores (Deputy Project Manager, Stillwater Refuge), Dan Walsworth (Project Leader, Stillwater Refuge), Graham Chisolm (Great Basin Bird Observatory), and Larry Neel (Nevada Department of Wildlife and GBBO) were meeting to discuss ways of drawing public attention to and celebrating the spectacular spring bird migration and wonderful wetlands found in the Lahontan Valley. The name, "Spring Wings," was coined by Larry. It was decided that the event would coincide with International Migratory Bird Day, the second weekend in May (which is also Mother's Day in most years), and ways to raise seed money were discussed. Dan offered up one of his staff to coordinate the whole thing. That staff member was Janet Schmidt (Outdoor Recreation Planner for Stillwater NWR) who to this day is still the coordinator and without whom the festival would not be where it is today. She has put her heart and soul into this event.

The Great Basin Bird Observatory (GBBO) took on the job of organizing, promoting, and handling the financial responsi-

bilities of the festival for the first four years. After that time Spring Wings had grown enough that GBBO turned it over to the current 501 c(3) non-profit organization.

Of the four "founding fathers," only Larry is still active in the event. He leads tours and holds workshops as his continuing contribution to Spring Wings. Dan, Bob, and Graham have all left the area but will never be forgotten. They all had a vision that I feel honored to be a small part of keeping alive.

A great number of people have contributed to the success of Spring Wings. The organizing committee members, board of directors, festival coordinator, field trip leaders, volunteers, guest speakers, workshop instructors, vendors, sponsors, and last but not least are the over one thousand participants that have come out to help us celebrate the spring migration of hundreds of thousands of birds that find their way to and/or through the Lahontan Valley.

Several years ago the idea of Spring Wings, the organization, becoming a friends group of the Stillwater NWR was first discussed. Since then the idea has moved forward to become a near reality. There are all kinds of projects that the refuge needs a helping hand with. Some are outlined in this newsletter, others are in the formative stage, and others are still in your imaginations.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the festival in May and at our "friends" projects throughout the year. We welcome your friendship, support, and thoughts.

Jim

Spring Wings Board of Directors

Jim Lytle - President
Kevin DesRoberts - Vice Pres.
Rick Gray - Secretary/Treasurer
Carol Colip, DeAl Dankers,
Kathi Wilson, Cindy Goddard



Volunteers are needed!!!

Are you tired of just enjoying the amazing field trips, the captivating speakers, and the enticing artwork in the convention center? Do you want to feel more a part of the festival? Then we have an opportunity for you! Help is needed with the Spring Wings store, setting up & tearing down of the event, and in the Kid's Area.

Qualifications: A willingness to have fun and help others enjoy the festival even more.

Time: Friday 12-5, Saturday 9-5, Sunday 9-2, 2-4+ hour shifts available. (Help also needed earlier on Friday and later on Sunday.)

Salary: Does eternal gratitude count?

Contact the festival staff for more information.



For more information:

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Fallon, NV 89407

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<http://www.springwings.org>

Email: info@springwings.org



Stillwater Refuge Tentative Work Dates

March 19 - Fence removal
April 9 - Fence construction
April 17 - Photography blind construction
April 30 - Photography blind construction
May 28 - Stillwater overlook construction
June 4 - Stillwater overlook construction
June 11 - Stillwater overlook construction

Appropriate dress is long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and good boots or sturdy shoes. A wide-brimmed hat, sunscreen, cool water and snacks will make the work project more pleasant. We will start work at Stillwater at 9:00 am on the scheduled day and plan to quit about 3:00 pm. Each project is geared to a specific task, such as fence removal, overlook construction, photograph blind etc. Many of the projects will entail wood frame construction and we would appreciate hearing ahead of time from volunteers who have expertise in this area. Refuge staff will supervise but if we have knowledgeable individuals they may be assigned a small crew and a specific task to accomplish on their own. We would also be happy to accomodate Boy or Girl Scouts, or other groups looking for a work project.

If interested in helping, please RSVP at least one week prior to the tentative work date at 428-6452. The refuge will provide lunch, all necessary tools, gloves, and materials. Also, please let us know about any related skills you may possess.



Stillwater Refuge: Past, Present, & Future

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Spring Wings newsletter. My name is Mike Goddard and my staff and I manage Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge. I am very excited to get this chance to talk with you about the refuge, about where we have been, where we are today, and the challenging opportunities we have before us.

A brief history is in order to set the current stage. Stillwater marsh flourished for many years at the end of the Carson River, providing a rich place to live for wildlife and people. This changed dramatically with the advent of farming in the valley when river water was diverted from the marsh and replaced with drain water. Caught up in the politics of water and endangered species, Stillwater marsh almost dried up in the late 1980's. A group of determined sportsman and wetland advocates lobbied the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Senator Reid to include a water rights purchase program in pending water rights settlement legislation. The legislation, passed in 1990, authorized the Service to purchase water rights for the marsh and assured the future of the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge. Today, our refuge biologist has nearly 20,000 acre-feet of water available to manage the marsh and we are continuing to purchase additional water.

For many years, people viewed Stillwater solely as a place for duck hunting. There didn't seem to be much demand for other activity. Refuge staff focused on wildlife management and made little effort to facilitate other uses. The situation changed in 1997 when we hired Janet Schmidt, our first (and best) Outdoor Recreation Planner and began working with others to create the Spring Wings bird festival. Spring Wings festival changed the dynamic by showing a great demand for education, interpretation, photography, and wildlife observation. The refuge began a concerted effort to create new visitor facilities on the refuge. We are building a wildlife viewing area at Stillwater Point and designing photographic blinds. This summer, we will be restoring 60 acres of wetlands and wet meadows near the refuge entrance at the old Kent ranch and building an auto tour route. An outdoor classroom at Duff's Pond, on the new tour route, is also in the works.

Although the refuge has a staff and budget, we can't afford to do everything we see a need for. We need the help of our friends to accomplish our goals. These goals include tangible things like visitor and educational facilities and intangibles such as community and political support. Spring Wings members can help in many ways such as volunteering time for the Spring Wings festival, construction projects, wildlife surveys, and educational programs. The refuge is in need of people with computer, biological, educational, construction, and other skills. You get to help the wildlife resource, meet new and interesting people, learn new skills, work hard and have fun. What a great deal! And talk about being appreciated.

Aldo Leopold wrote "There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot." Nevada is growing rapidly and so is Fallon. As growth occurs at an ever-increasing pace, places like the Stillwater marsh become even more important. We need these places to observe and contemplate the natural world. Wildlife needs these places to live, to raise young, and seek shelter in their migrations. I am firmly in the camp of those who cannot live without wild things in my life and hope you are as well. I look forward to meeting you and working beside you on our projects.

Stillwater Point Viewing Area

The Lahontan Valley is designated a site of International importance by the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network (one of less than 50 such designations); an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society; and Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge is designated a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy. Although much touted by biologists and birders for its major part in the Pacific Flyway, there are no informational kiosks or other places in the Valley where the general visitor may acquire an awareness for this critical oasis in the Great Basin ecosystem while engaged in the environment.

The Churchill County Museum presently has the only interpretive display depicting the Stillwater Marsh and its wildlife, and that facility is located in the center of Fallon, Nevada. This first step towards interpretation of the resource at the site will provide visitors with a much needed educational component. They will be able to see, hear, feel, smell, and touch the Valley as they read the explanations

and study the drawings. The conservation message is best put forth in “*Fulfilling the Promise*”, written by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, July 1999. “The future of wildlife is best assured by raising the public’s awareness and understanding in wildlife conservation. This can be done effectively on national wildlife refuges where visitors can see for themselves the connections between people and wildlife, habitat, and land management...With a century of experience, the System has learned that people are as much a part of our landscape as the habitat we manage. Our visions for the System are thus painted with the hues of public enjoyment, understanding, and involvement”.

We will work with several partners and a contingency of volunteers to design, develop and construct a viewing platform, interpretive trail, and outreach site to educate visitors on the importance of Stillwater Marsh and the Lahontan Valley. The primary message will be the importance of the area over time to both human and wildlife inhabitants.

The Stillwater Point Viewing Area is the first step in a major project to design and construct visitor facilities on Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge. The Stillwater Point Viewing Area will be the staging area for visitor orientation and viewing which will be constructed along our new 10-mile auto tour route (currently in the design phase). Located along East County Road and overlooking Stillwater Point Reservoir, this site will provide an orientation kiosk, an interpretive trail and overlook, and a vault toilet. The trail will recount several “millennium moments” - illustrations of how the environment and people’s interaction with it have changed over the past thousand years and how the wildlife have been influenced. The orientation kiosk will depict points of interest and seasonal information.

The fully accessible trail will be constructed of state of the art hardening material, with small walking “pull outs” containing small interpretive panels explaining the “millennium moments”. Benches will be provided at some points for those who need to rest.

At the completion of the project, visitors will have a central area to visit a comfort station, become oriented to the general area, view wildlife, glean information about Stillwater Refuge Complex, and become more aware of the Service’s mission to provide important spaces for wildlife.



Building a Photo Blind

Stillwater Refuge is taking on an additional project to enhance wildlife observation. The Washington Office of the National Wildlife Refuge System has partnered with the North American Nature Photography Association, which is the first and only association in North America committed solely to serving the field of nature photography.

NANPA promotes the art and science of nature photography as a medium of communication for nature appreciation and environmental protection; provides education and inspiration, gathers and disseminates information, and develops standards for all persons interested in the field of nature photography; and fosters professionalism and ethical conduct in all aspects of our endeavors.

In a unique opportunity, NANPA will provide 66%, and FWS 33%, of the funding to construct a photo blind, in an amount not to exceed \$1,500. NANPA and the FWS provide the funding, and we just add volunteers! Through Refuge volunteers, boy scouts, girl scouts, 4-H groups, etc, this project, too, will become a reality. The goal of the completed blind is to provide an opportunity for those who want to observe, photograph, and draw wildlife in seclusion for a period of time.



Booth Space is Available

Do you have wares and crafts that are nature related that you would like to sell? Or do you have activities designed for youth (of all ages)? If so, you can contact the festival to see about getting booth space during the event. Space is limited so apply now. The fee is one piece of artwork or other item to be used at the Silent Auction. Environmental Education stations are free!!

Eighth Annual Spring Wings Festival in Fallon May 13-15, 2005

Spring Wings Bird Festival is for anyone interested in birds and the great outdoors. It is the celebration of the songbirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl returning to the Lahontan Valley from all over the western world. The festival will offer several new field trips this year including a tour of one of the local marshes by airboat. Another will include an evening of “buglighting” with John Acorn, The Nature Nut, our featured guest speaker. It’s simply amazing the types and amount of little (and not so little) night critters you can attract with a simple sheet and a blacklight!!

The Friday night banquet will feature the return engagement of The Nature Nut, John Acorn. John is a much sought after Nature Festival entertainer. His long-running children’s show “The Nature Nut” ran for many years on the Animal Planet channel. He also has syndicated a second series, “Twits and Pishers” for the birding enthusiast. An entomologist (bug guy) by training, his wit, knowledge of nature’s creatures as well as his knowledge of human behavior had ‘em rolling in the aisles during his last visit. He sings, he teaches, he makes us laugh – he does it all!!

After Saturday’s field trips there will be a light buffet dinner and talks by local artist Ray Nelson and Point Reyes Naturalist/Storyteller Ane Rovetta. The evening promises to be a highly charged and totally entertaining venue. The focus will be on the arts, as Ray discusses birding through the eyes of an artist. Ane is always surprising us with her perspective on art as well as delving into the ancient myths and cultural significance of birds and the natural world. Both speakers will provide humor and a message to take away with us.

The very popular Bat Tours and Owl Prowl will follow the buffet and talks Saturday night. There may also be another bird release of several rehabilitated raptors during the festival - including the possibility of another owl release Saturday before the Prowl. Last year’s release was courtesy of Nancy Laird, from the Wild Animal Infirmary for Nevada.

This year’s theme is “Kids and Nature”. We’ll be increasing the activities we offer for kids of all ages!! Come and help us celebrate the migration and nature in the Lahontan Valley.

Stillwater Refuge Environmental Education Area

At the present time, there is no area on Stillwater Refuge (or the entire Complex) for Environmental Education (EE) to be separated from other uses such as hunting...a specification listed as a requirement in USFWS Environmental Education policy. Additionally, there are no visitor facilities whatsoever on Stillwater Refuge, but there is a demand for such by the local school district. In the past, schools from as far away as Reno and Carson City (round trip of 130+ miles) visited the refuge. Recently, the school districts have experienced major cutbacks and are not able to afford to bus students to the area for what little Stillwater Refuge can offer. Before the addition of the new tour loop, students would have to venture 15 miles from the entrance to the Refuge before arriving at a suitable site to engage in EE and view a number of habitats. With the addition of facilities closer to the entrance, we will be able to successfully procure participation by local school districts. Another concern with more local schools as well as those located within 100 mile radius is the absence of comfort stations, especially for the younger (K-2) students. The addition of a vault toilet will enhance the program greatly, as will a covered pavilion for study purposes, providing an outdoor learning center which is comfortable and safe.

The EE area will be constructed along our new 10-mile tour loop. The plans call for the EE site to be constructed approximately a mile from the entrance to Stillwater Refuge on the north tip of Duff's Pond, now currently closed to the public. This site will contain a



John Acorn with a Great gray owl - Photo by Laura Newstead

parking area, sufficient for two school busses and additional car parking. A covered pavilion will include a number of permanent “work stations”, picnic table design, for study of flora, fauna, water, and soils. The pavilion will be placed in a strategic location along a trail/boardwalk which will allow students and others to access the wetland area without disrupting delicate substrate and native plant, insect and animal life. A short trail to an overlook will lead from the parking lot across the road to a vantage at which another undisturbed unit as well as a riparian area can be viewed from afar. A permanent scope will eventually be mounted on this natural overlook for the convenience of students and wildlife observers.

Additionally, curriculum will be designed specifically for the EE Area to facilitate students and teachers in their wetland and desert experience. The curriculum will be designed to meet the needs of the local school district and will be part of a larger curriculum project to bring Stillwater Marsh into the classroom. Primary responsibility for design of the curriculum will be refuge staff in coordination with Churchill County School District personnel to insure we design a compatible, useful program.

The finished project would provide a shaded/protected area for students of all ages to become engaged in the wetlands and neighboring habitat. Teacher training and workshops would be conducted here to inspire educators to use the area and explore its potential for “hands on” science. Elementary, middle and high school students would be provided curriculum tailored specifically to the EE Area. This curriculum would be designed by refuge staff with coordination from the school district(s) and educational institutions to most aptly promote their students’ understanding and learning.

The trails and boardwalk would provide an accessible avenue to areas previously difficult to investigate.

Stillwater Refuge staff currently engages mostly elementary students with their present Environmental Education program. With the development of the EE Center, additional curriculum, guided by the Nevada Science Standards, could be developed for K-12 as well as college level exploration, and provide a venue for the general visitor to gain access to a wetland area when not in use by students which is an opportunity currently not available.



Before and After the removal of Stillwater Refuge’s old maintenance shop. This area will eventually be restored to a natural look with native vegetation, by Federal Highways. They are constructing the new tour loop through the Sanctuary area of the refuge. This area will be located adjacent to the new parking area and viewing platform, out over the Stillwater Point Reservoir. The picture below shows both the parking lot for the viewing platform (on the right side by the water) and the road that will become the start of the tour loop (angling away from the parking lot and towards the upper right corner of the picture).

